

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 18 MARCH 2013

PRESENT:- Councillor David Wood (Chair), Councillor Richard Hurley (Vice-Chair), Councillor Rex Barnett, Councillor Mary Friend, Councillor Fay Howard, Councillor Teresa Page, Mr Trevor Davies, Mr Mike Compton and Mr Richard Hailstone.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr David Dawson.

15. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

16. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2013, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

17. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

18. Exempt Items - Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved - That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred in Agenda Item 7 on the grounds that it would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information concerned (Minute 20 refers.)

19. Ethical Framework Update

The Committee received a report from the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) providing an update on matters relating to the Ethical Framework, including:

- a) The 14th Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life – the Committee agreed the revised description of the 7 principles in the preamble to the Members Code of Conduct, as listed in Appendix 1 to the report and which had been agreed by the Corporate Governance Review Working Group on 7th March 2013.
- b) Annual Governance Statement – The Committee noted the Annual Governance Statement Framework as listed in Appendix 2 to the report and the Group Directors' Assurance Statement at Appendix 3. It was agreed that an additional statement be added under section 7 (staff) stating 'are you and your staff aware of the Council's rules relating to the Whistleblowing Policy?' The Director of Law and Democratic Services commented that he was

unaware of any control or governance issues that had resulted in significant public interest or had seriously damaged the Council's reputation but that he would ask internal Audit if they were aware of any and, if so, would email details round to members of the Committee.

- c) Dispensations – the Committee noted that no dispensations had been granted by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee, since the last meeting.
- d) Independent Person Protocol – The Director of Law and Democratic Services tabled a draft protocol relating to the role of the Independent Person. The Director of Law and Democratic Services agreed to review previous minutes to confirm whether or not agreement had been reached regarding the role of the Independent Person in Assessment Panels. It was also agreed that the two Independent Persons would meet with the Director of Law and Democratic Services to review the draft protocol in detail and submit their proposals to a future meeting.
- e) Parish Councils - the Committee noted the update on Parish Council training, the adoption of a Members Code of Conduct and the Register of Interests published since the last meeting. Further training would be provided to Chiseldon Parish Council on 26th March 2013 and would be available to other Parish Councillors.
- f) Standards Exchange – the Director of Law and Democratic Services reported that the Council had subscribed to this interactive website and had requested alerts on particular issues. He agreed to investigate the possibility of posting issues on the website.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Ethical Framework update be noted.
- (2) That the Council amend the Members Code of Conduct to reflect the updated principles of public life in the 14th report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life as set out in Appendix 1, to promote consistency with the standards to which other holders of public office are held.
- (3) That, subject to the inclusion of a statement outlining the requirement for Group Directors and their staff to be aware of the rules relating to the Whistleblowing Policy under Section 7, the process and questionnaire for the preparation of the Council's Annual Governance Statement as set in Appendices 2 and 3, be agreed.
- (4) That information on any control or governance issues that had resulted in significant public interest or had seriously damaged the Council's reputation be circulated to members of the Committee.
- (5) That agreement on the draft protocol relating to the role of the Independent Person be deferred until the next meeting, pending further discussion between the Independent Persons and the Director of Law and Democratic Services.
- (6) That the Council's subscription with Standards Exchange be noted.

20. Ethical Compliance Report

The Committee considered an exempt report from the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) regarding the outcome of various ethical framework compliance matters, including progress on Whistleblowing cases since the last Committee, Breach of the Protocol for Member/Officer Relations and Code of Conduct Complaints.

The Committee noted that controls had improved as a result of two of the Whistleblowing cases and the Director of Law and Democratic Services agreed to investigate whether any of the complainants had received any unfavourable treatment as a direct result of making the complaint.

Resolved – (1) That the Ethical Framework Compliance report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Law and Democratic Services investigate whether any of the Whistleblowing complainants had received unfavourable treatment as a direct result of making the complaint.